

1995

Ascension

Clifford M. Commanday

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

Ascension

by

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October 1995

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents; they are my support, my inspiration, and my friends.

Special Thanks

I owe thanks to Bob, Rick, and Bruce, my thesis advisors;

to Sandy Beckerman, for always helping me stay on track my first year;

to Katelyn Thorne, for being an honest colleague and friend
(and the best neighbor I've had in quite a while);

and to Meg Walborn, for simply always being a friend.

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Introduction

"I look upon life as a series of journeys.

This series of forms is devoted to a sense of Ascension,
both physical and spiritual."

Clifford M Commanday

This statement accompanied my thesis show at the Bevier Gallery, and clearly and simply describes the intent of my thesis. One of the strongest characteristics I see present within all the journeys of my life thus far is a desire to succeed and advance: to ascend. I have made a series of sculptures focused on communicating these feelings.

This thesis is divided into three sections: I will discuss my metaphor of ascension, describe the processes involved in creating the sculptures, and then describe and analyze the sculptures.

Metaphor

Description

Throughout my life, I have had a powerful desire to succeed - to ascend. I can remember always wishing to advance, to grow, and to raise my level of consciousness and personal spirituality. As an example, when I was young this manifested as the desire to become a better basketball player; I would shoot both left and right-handed drills for hours in the cold. In school my interests were in computer science; I spent hours and hours at my keyboard, and my teachers had to work hard to keep up with me. I wrote much poetry and many short stories exploring how I viewed the world. I saw life as the opportunity to grow.

It seems logical to me now that I would create a series of sculptures intending to communicate the forces behind such desires. The installation for my thesis show consisted of seven tall, upreaching sculptures made of ceramics and cement that rise from the floor to a peak of ten feet. They stand at least a few feet taller than the average person, forcing a viewer to look upward when close to them. In my first year of study at RIT, I realized that this use of scale would be essential to draw the viewer into the pieces. The technical solution to this was difficult to achieve, but I wanted to create this specific interaction with my pieces. I wanted people to have to physically lift their heads, to look up, and potentially feel the desire to rise up with the sculpture. I was told by a number of people that viewing the collection of the sculptures in the gallery was like walking through an old forest, rich with history, rich with life.

The pieces have many edges, ledges, and facets. Each of these represents a step in a journey, combined together for the purpose of ascension. Each piece, therefore, can be seen as either a complete journey, or a part of a larger one; and, when multiple pieces

are grouped together, they can be seen as collections of these journeys. Early on, I had conversations with Bruce Meader, a member of my thesis committee, about whether I was trying in each piece to represent complete journeys or parts of journeys. I realized that within our lives we engage in many journeys. It is in these journeys, combined together, that we define our lives.

Critical to the interpretation of my ascension metaphor is that there is no representation of a specific destination or end-goal to the journey one takes upward the piece. It is the journey itself, not the destination, of which I wanted the sculptures to speak. Success is not merely a destination, it is the process of continuing to reach upwards. Each step becomes the foundation to build upon to reach the next step or level.

I wanted the sculptures to address a sense of personal spirituality. That is, not one attached to, and I believe thus limited by, any of society's formal religious institutions. I intentionally avoided specific religious iconography and imagery to increase the possibility of the viewer's access to such a sense of personal spirituality.

I am reminded of a comment by Rosalind E. Krause discussing the work of Beverly Pepper. She spoke of the "inner logic of the analogies that drive art, that cause someone at one time or another to stand, transfixed, in front of a soaring, useless wall" (143). I create my work with both an intellectual and emotional consciousness, which often leads me to stand, transfixed, in front of soaring RIT walls.

The processes in which I worked had a direct influence on the final look of the sculptures in my thesis show. The exuberance I felt as I created the tall ceramic spires is reflected, I believe, in their form and surface. The cement bases retain visual remnants of the improvisational mold forms I created from miscellaneous scrap wood. These by-products

of the process further justify each step taken in the creation of the pieces, and further allude to a sense of journey.

Evolution

My development of this thesis has itself been part of a personal journey. It has proven to be a crucial step in my development as an artist and sculptor. My metaphor has developed over the past five years, with its roots in the work I did for my undergraduate degree. (See Table 1 Progression of Metaphor, Building Processes and Forms in Appendix A.)

When I came to RIT, I had a “large bucket of ideas” that I was trying to communicate in my pieces all at once. At first, I was trying to communicate a complex set of ideas about the interaction of humankind with nature and spirituality, humankind with technology, humankind with architecture, and humankind with humankind.

The development of this thesis was a constant battle to remove all the unnecessary elements, all the “extra information” from the “bucket.” From the beginning, my professor Rick Hirsch urged me to focus, to be more deliberate and less literal with my sculptures. These recommendations reflected my personal struggles to sharpen my views on these issues.

I realized that I should not try to answer so many broad and generalized questions in my sculptures. At first, the communication I was perhaps most successful at achieving was intrapersonal: developing my understanding of how I feel about the relationship between spirituality and technology. I believe we strongly feel the influence of technology upon our society, but I do not believe it is technology that prevents us, as a culture, from developing or ascending to a personal sense of spirituality. I realized that it was not necessary to represent technology in my metaphor; instead, I focused on the personal

growth and the personal risk that attaches to growth, and the effort to ascend. This was a major step in the evolution of my thesis. In the end, I believe I was successful with my sculptures because I focused not on specifics, but on an abstract notion and feeling, this desire to ascend, or succeed.

When I was developing my skills on the potter's wheel in undergraduate school at Syracuse University, I wanted those pots to "rise, lift up," as I described it then.

I focused heavily on the lip, and how its curve could activate a great amount of space above a pot. I was drawn to the architecture of Doric columns, for their physical and visual strength and lift, and I was inspired to create a series of tall, pottery-influenced vessel forms.

One of my goals for attending graduate school was to clarify in my pieces, and to myself, the separate influences upon my work of pottery and of vessels and sculpture. My decision in my first year at RIT to focus heavily on sculpture rather than pottery was a difficult one. I have a love for the process of throwing, but as my work developed it became clear as I filtered through my "big bucket" that this change of focus was necessary. No longer were my ideas as connected to the functionalism associated with pottery. The highly conceptual ideas I wanted to discuss in my work were not centered on the concepts of "inside/outside" or "container/contents" which vessel-making can so well communicate, but my intentions of communicating a sense of ascension seemed better suited to sculptural forms. This process of moving towards sculpture involved a few stages for me; I consider the series "Watching Places" which I created next, to be an important step in this direction.

These sculptures of the "Watching Places" series were approximately five feet high, and very capacious - decidedly different from the very slender linear work in my thesis show.

There is an opening at the top of each piece, a form suggesting an altar inside the large implied interior volume; rising from the base were many small, intricate steps carved into the surface. I was trying to develop the concept of architecture as a container for human activity, the activity in this case being worship.

But my “big bucket” was still very full. I was trying to use explicit imagery - the detailed carving of the steps and staircases to altars - to draw upon historical references to architecture of spiritual places, to avoid reference to any specific religion, and also to draw upon highly metaphorical references to the interaction of humankind with these sculptures. In plain terms, the contents of my “bucket” were spilling all over the floor. I had to choose and focus. It was not until after I finished this series that I realized I needed to focus on the underlying emotion guiding all these ideas.

I decided to use the concepts and imagery associated with architecture as a background, or supporting metaphor, for my work; these references and translations of different examples of architecture provided a context for the main metaphor.

I began to use an extremely linear vocabulary of form to focus the attention of the viewer upwards. With a much simpler and clearer idea of what I wanted to create, after developing the technical resolution to the armature (which I describe in the Process Section of this thesis), I produced the ceramic portions of the final sculptures rather quickly. My next task was to resolve the transition from the pieces to their bases.

What a simple sentence to write...but solving this transition was one of the most challenging aspects of this thesis, and demanded the greatest portion of my attention during the last few months before my thesis show. At first, the transition was too drastic in comparison to the rest of the piece. I began to integrate the cement higher into the

ceramic portion, as well as to integrate the faceted imagery from the top into the cement base. The evolution was slow-going, but I was determined to make it work. I knew that I had finally chosen all the right pieces to the puzzle; I just had to keep working to find solutions I was satisfied with - and I did.

References

One theme running through my two years of work and study at RIT has been a reference to architectural materials. In my first year of graduate work at RIT I was struck very profoundly by the Brutalist architectural style of the campus. When I walked around campus I found myself exploring and touching the bricks of the buildings. I was drawn to the intensity of the forms in space, and the angles created by the interaction of the buildings. My favorite spot of inspiration was the ramp between buildings 7A and 7B (see Photographs 1-5 in Appendix C). From that vantage point, there were so many subtleties to observe, such as the way a layer of bricks would protrude from a structural layer implied underneath the surface, and create shadows on the railings below. The images of these bricks and their surfaces appear in much of the work I have done at RIT, from pottery forms with carved brick detail, to the sculptures in my thesis show.

The deep burnt orange colors of these surfaces also affected me. The ingredient in the bricks that is mostly responsible for this color is red iron oxide (Fe_2O_3), a material which has fascinated me since undergraduate school. It has a long and varied history in ceramics, from its natural occurrence in earthenware clays to its use in the decoration of Egyptian pottery. The cement present in the bases of my thesis show sculptures is a reference to architectural building materials, a connection strengthened by the use of red iron oxide.

Brutalism is an architectural style born of the formalist modernism of the early twentieth

century. The style is characterized by a clarity of form, a celebration of materials in their raw state, and a specificity of spaces and their use; it has its origins of thought in the modernist style of the Bauhaus, and architects Walter Gropius and Mies Van der Rohe. RIT's campus, opened in 1968 and designed by Roche and Dinkeloo, has a Brutalist core, characterized by a "punched block" aesthetic and the gestalt of a massive sculptural expression of the rigors of academic pursuit.

In winter, a blanket of snow transforms the campus' stark geometry. The snow piles up, and the wind fills the sharp brick angles with snow. The wind channels through the paths between buildings and creates long curved embankments of snow. I remember one cold evening leaving the studio and becoming enthralled with one particularly long embankment. The wind was shaping it as I watched, creating an amazing texture I can only describe as white upon white steps of snow. To be honest, after four years of Syracuse weather (and being a non-skier) I was plumb sick of the sight of snow, but this experience changed my mind, and gave me a new way to see it.

An important influence on me has been the work of Beverly Pepper. (See Photographs 8-9 in Appendix C.) Her work is consistently strong in its use of form in space, and the activation of the space surrounding the forms. The works of hers that I am drawn to most are those which reference both primitive and modern tools. The pieces are strong and massive, rising as high as fifty feet, boldly piercing the sky. Although these sculptures of Pepper's reflect a sense of mass, where mine utilize a more linear vocabulary of form, her references to man-made objects have similarities to some of my own concerns, and her simple and elegant solutions have intrigued me.

Another strong influence on my work was the ancient architecture of spiritual places. I have never been so eager to visit a place as I was the first time I saw pictures of ancient

Peruvian temples. I saw these as ancient images of a culture whose members carved spiritual places out of mountains. An incredible amount of attention was focused on the carved staircases to these places. I imagined that as one climbed them one would have a ritualistic experience of ascending the mountain to reach an altar. I was immersed in those steps. From the first sight of these temples, their images have been a strong continuous influence on my work.

The manner in which the bases of the modular series of my thesis show sculptures are placed have references to ancient architectural planning. In the design of the space between the bases. I drew upon references from Egyptian city planning, as well as Romantic Roman city planning.

I try to balance the inspirations from the products of both humankind and nature. Around October, 1994 I visited the Highland Waterfalls in Rochester. I very much enjoyed the waterfalls themselves, and the way the water flows downstream over the rocks, but I believe what influenced me most was the sight of the layers of earth exposed by the ancient flow of the river. (See Photographs 6-7 in Appendix C.)

The carved channel of the old river bed revealed layers and layers of ancient earth and land, cut sharp, but with the undulating curve of a fluid river. This reference to, and product of, ancient time affected me deeply. It is not the first time I have seen such imagery, nor the first time I have enjoyed it, but there was something profound about this experience in the context of my other study and research for my thesis.

Alternate Solutions

During the development of this thesis I considered other solutions to my metaphor.

A major one was to create walking sticks. I felt a walking stick inherently reinforced the idea of a journey. It could refer to the person or peoples carrying out the journey, as well as to the kind of primitive society which would create the kinds of places of worship such as I was imagining. The walking sticks I created were of wood, fallen branches from trees in Rochester's Highland Park that I then carved and sanded. The linear nature of the sticks corresponds to the linearity of the sculptures I was to develop.

I did not use the walking sticks for a few reasons. The most important was that I was not satisfied with their evolution; they were not fully resolved. I was working on them during winter quarter of my second year, and in the interests of time management, I chose to refocus my efforts on resolving the issues with the major pieces.

Also, I was not sure how I felt about the different use of scale from the sticks to the sculptures. The sticks existed on a human scale, but the sculptures relied on playing with perspective, alluding to heights larger than life. At the very least, I enjoyed being out in the cold searching for just the right branches.

Another possible solution involved linear constructions of collections of cast cement poles. I chose not to do these simply because I wanted to resolve the other sculptures I had started. I hope to attempt this solution in the future.

Process

During the course of this thesis, I explored a variety of building techniques. As my metaphor developed, I always tried to use an appropriate technique. (See Table 1 Progression of Metaphor, Building Processes and Forms in Appendix A.) As I stated earlier, the processes in which I worked had a direct influence on the final look of the sculptures in my thesis show. (See Photographs 10-29 in Appendix D.) I have grouped the sculptures into two categories: the organic series (Photographs 10-15, and 17-27) and the modular series (Photographs 16, 28-29). In my thesis show, the modular series is represented by one sculpture, created by a pair of square columns placed closely to each other.

Armatures

When I decided to create extremely tall and thin sculptures, it was a difficult process to develop the appropriate armatures for creating and displaying the sculptures. I spent a good deal of time brainstorming ideas with my professor Bob Schmitz. For the organic series, the resulting armature for creating the works in clay consisted of a ten foot long, one inch diameter aluminum pole set vertically in a cement-filled bucket. The display armature for both series consisted of a half-inch diameter black-iron pipe set vertically in a solid base of cast cement. The fired clay and cast-cement sections of the final pieces were slid over the pipe. Afterwards, I cut each pipe with a hacksaw to the appropriate height for each sculpture.

These armatures proved to work very well. While I was creating the works, the round bucket allowed for relative ease in moving the armature during construction as I could lean the pole and roll it along the edge of the bucket. The decrease in the pipe diameter of the display armature allowed for shrinkage of the clay body.

Building Techniques

To create the ceramic sections I covered the entire pole with clay, having first covered it with layers of newspaper to aid removal. I experimented with both coil building and rolling slabs around the pole. It was not feasible to smooth the joint connections on the interior of the coil walls, which led to weak joints between the coils. The slab method in this case created stronger joints, and was quicker and more efficient at controlling the widths of the walls.

At this stage, I manipulated the clay in a variety of ways. I experimented with paddling the surface with an assortment of hand-made paddles, including found scrap woods, but the method used for the final pieces in my show involved using a wire-cutter to slice off chunks of clay creating facets. (See Photographs 24-25 in Appendix D.) I used a variety of different wires, including piano wire, guitar strings, and braided wire of assorted types.

I wanted the pieces to reflect a sense of aggressive and controlled lift. I gathered my energy and “hacked away” with the wire-cutter, causing chunks of clay to fly about my area (and my neighbor’s area as well). I often built up a frantic rhythm and sweat, pacing and circling around the piece while slicing; sometimes I think I was working in an oxygen-deprived state, drawing further into my instinct, past the guide of my intellect. I began to work at night because I felt freer to act “crazed” like this when I was alone in the studio.

After I faceted this tall column of clay, it was necessary to divide it into sections.

I attempted to do this at visual junctures in order to help disguise the joint.

(See Photographs 26-27.) As I created a few of these, I became more aware of the need to disguise the joints, and thus “trained” my instinct to account for this while

I “hacked away in a frenzy.” I believe an artist’s instinct should be primed by research and life experiences. The work of an artist who draws only upon instinct might not continue to develop and grow. I spent my first year of graduate study analyzing and developing many complex ideas. In my second year I realized it was time to stop intellectualizing as much, and begin responding more to the information I had gathered.

The modular series was not created on an armature, but constructed from template-cut slabs scored together. Instead of wire cutters, I used the claw of a hammer to gouge the surface. Clawing at these hollow rectangular columns I felt like a mountain climber, reaching and grabbing upwards with each stroke of the claw.

Color and Texture

In an effort to convey a sense of age I created many layers of texture and color in the surfaces of the pieces. The colors of these layers were created in a number of ways. I used an earthenware clay body once-fired to $\Delta 2$ (pronounced “cone two”), approximately 2124°F. (See Table 2 Clay Body Formula in Appendix A.) The natural deep browns of the clay were a result of the heavy reduction I employed at the end of the firing process. I did not use any slip or glazes because the resulting surface of the bare clay was the desired effect.

The clay body recipe that I used originated from a few of my peers in the ceramic studio utilizing a low to mid-fire sculpture clay body. For added texture and strength, I modified the original formula to include medium grog, and some occasional course grog, instead of fine grog. I also added 2% barium carbonate to the body to prevent scumming, a white film that can result on the surface of fired pieces from a reaction of the clay with the oils of my hands during handling before firing.

I created the range of deep burnt oranges in the bases by adding different amounts of red iron oxide to the wet cement mixture before applying or casting. I did most of the mixing in a large 50 gallon metal barrel cut in half and turned on its side, or in plastic buckets for smaller batches. I used a pre-mixed cement; all I needed to add was water and color. I did not measure the cement, water, and oxide exactly. I developed a keen sense of it after a great deal of mixing.

Onto the surface of the clay before firing, I used a variety of techniques, from lightly burnishing with rubber and metal ribs, to scraping the surface with everything from metal nails to my fingernails, to gouging the surface with the claw of a hammer. After firing I sanded, ground, scraped, and drilled through layers of spray paint and red iron oxide.

An essential tool for affecting the surfaces after firing was my cordless power drill. I had a lot of fun in the hardware store searching through all the different sanding and grinding bits. I gathered quite an eclectic collection of different size and textured bits that allowed me to create the aged-looking surfaces of the finished pieces.

The sculpture represented in Photographs 15, 24 and 25 uses a somewhat unorthodox method of color application. I used charcoal sticks, a traditional drawing medium, to rub onto the edges of the ceramic facets to accentuate the edges. Underneath the charcoal were layers of white and black spray paint, and I used a spray fixative atop of the charcoal to make it more permanent. Consistent with the manner I achieved all the layer effects, I did the process of layering the dark charcoal and the light spray paint numerous times until I had achieved an aged look I was pleased with.

Bases

To create the cement bases, I poured the wet mixture into mold forms made of wood.

On a leveled surface, I first poured a one cubic foot cement cube, the mold form created with plywood connected by metal brackets and screws to aid removal. I covered the interior of the wood surfaces with a thin coat of vaseline also to aid removal, and prevent leakage between the boards. When I had the mold half full I inserted the pipe vertically, keeping it at least an inch above the ground. To keep the pipe perpendicular to the floor as I finished pouring into the mold and as it set, I taped the pipe to a pole laid horizontally across two chairs, one on each side of the mold. I then used a level to ensure the pole was perpendicular to the leveled surface on the floor.

After this initial base was poured, it allowed me to insert the ceramic sections over the pole, and begin integrating the two. At first, the transition from the square base was too drastic. To help this transition area, one technique I tried was chiselling away at the top and the corners of the cement cube. I used a cold-press chisel and a heavy mallet. Again, pieces went flying about my area, landing often in my neighbor's area as well. This proved not to be as effective as I had hoped, and was as well, physically demanding (and damaging to my mallet), so I began to raise the ceramic section higher above the square base before I began to cast in order to have more room to create the transition.

Instead of beginning with a cubic foot base for the last two sculptures, I poured the mixture into a two foot cardboard cylinder that I cut in half lengthwise, and lined with vaseline to aid removal. The cardboard cylinder was quite strong; it was the center of the end-roll paper that the studio uses from the printing department. Due to its smaller diameter, this shift to the cylindrical form gave me more freedom to build the transition from the cement base to the ceramic pieces.

I developed an improvisational method of creating the wood forms to pour the cement into, around this base, to build up the stepped and faceted imagery present in the final pieces. The method was rather simple; I used found scrap wood to build up vertical forms around the base, supported it with other wood, and then filled the inside of the form created with cement. I learned that in order for this additional cement to adhere to the initial base, I needed to surround the pole with at least 1/4" of cement. I repeated this process many times: first making the mold, pouring the cement, and then letting it set at least overnight. After I removed the mold, I could then add another layer higher up on the base, continuing this process until I had fully integrated the base to the ceramic sections.

I learned that different proportions of cement mixture to water yielded cement of different strengths and textures: the less water, the stronger the cement. It was an interesting process, learning how to balance these properties. I never thought I would come to know so much about cement.

Thesis Show Installation

My thesis show installation consisted of seven sculptures, six representing the organic series, and one representing the modular series. There was limited floor space available in the Bevier Gallery due to the large number of Masters Candidates in the show, as well as to a limited area in the gallery that had adequate ceiling height.

I debated at first whether to display these tall linear spires in a consolidated group, or spread out through the floor space. Working with the assistance of Betsy Murkett, the Gallery Director, we chose a floorplan somewhat in between. The sculptures were placed along somewhat of an L-shape dividing the front part of the gallery. This allowed the sculptures to be seen collectively, without making too dense a grouping.

This arrangement allowed for individual views of each sculpture.

As described in the process section, the individual sections of each sculpture were stacked atop each other around a black-iron pipe extending vertically from each cement base. For the temporary installation required for the thesis show, I used a thin layer of plasticine between sections to increase stability and ensure a tight fit. I was able to hand mix different colored plasticine to best match the color surrounding the joints.

For the modular series, however, I used a more visible thick layer of contrasting black plasticine to accentuate the joints between each module. Overall, the plasticine proved to be quite effective.

Analysis

The sculptures are tall, slender, and linear spires. Each has a strong solid base, and taper upwards with many edges, ledges and facets to a peak as high as ten feet. Each sculpture is a collection of physically separate sections joined together, and an important distinction between the sculptures is how these joints are treated. You can view a journey as having many parts; sometimes it is easier to distinguish the individual parts than other times.

I recognized a clear distinction between the different processes involved in making the organic series and the modular series. In order to create the organic series, I had to create a sculpture, then section it into pieces. The modular series was quite the opposite: I created pieces to be put together afterwards. I realized something very important about myself - I prefer making assemblages, putting pieces together.

I believe this relates to my interests in graphic design. I look upon that medium, especially typography, as a collection of pre-made elements almost in desire themselves to be moved around over and over again until they find a home. I believe this observation about myself, my preference to work in modular art and assemblage, is one of the most important discoveries and developments so far in my career as an artist and designer.

The modular series' visually separate units might elicit the notion of clear and distinctive steps within a journey - a collection of separate events joined only by physical means and their placement. These separate events could be seen as distinct parts within a journey riddled with their own innate difficulties, in which further tension is then created by the connections of these events to each other.

The joints of the organic series' sections are more disguised, occurring at subtle

visual and physical junctures. (See Figures 26-27.) This creates a more continuous flow of line and direction in the organic series. I believe this flow describes the steps within those journeys as more interdependent, interlocked physically and interconnected metaphorically.

The sculpture in my thesis show representing the modular series is very different in appearance and configuration from the other series. Instead of a single spire, it consists of two square columns placed in very close proximity. (See Photograph 28, detailing how closely the bases of the two columns are placed.) When these two columns are placed in this close proximity, there is an exciting activation of the negative space between them. Furthermore, when a grouping of these sculptures is displayed, this sense of negative space and interaction is greatly enhanced.

These columns, made of modular pieces either of clay or cement, are achieved through a "stacking effect," placing the modules one on top of another. Some of the cement modules extend laterally from the column, and produce strong visual connections and relationships to the other column. (See Photograph 29.) Formally, the height and width of each module and each cement connector form an organic sense of regular interval spacing. This regular interval flows vertically through each column, and is accentuated and balanced by the lateral extensions of the cement modulars. Additionally, focus and interest are created through the variety of the angles and depths of the cement modules.

These relationships, between the two columns and at the interaction of the two bases, can be seen as revealing how two journeys, either concurrent in time or not, can influence each other, and can influence the steps one takes within those journeys.

It was important to me when designing these sculptures to see how each section would

relate to the others in terms of the nature of sequential time. Following are three possible interpretations: the individual modules represent separate events that can be seen as occurring sequentially one right after another; or as happening at times spaced across a lifespan; or as belonging to more than one journey occurring concurrently, with the events woven through a span of time.

Describing actions as following each other implies a necessary dependence on each other, which reflects more upon the organic series and represents a gestalt that our actions are integrally connected and dependent, unable to be fully separated without losing a greater meaning. The modular series, on the other hand, being a collection of separate modules, represents a view that the actions that make up a journey need not be so directly connected or aligned, but could be purposefully placed in these alignments for the intended purpose of the journey. In other words, sometimes portions of a journey may be spanned across a large bridge of time, and it is our intentional and conscious grouping of these events that formulate the sense of the journey.

These journeys can have metaphorical and allegorical links across a lifespan. As I stated in Section I, Metaphor, "It is in these journeys, combined together, that we define our lives."

Conclusion

I can recall a particular moment, about a month after my thesis show closed, that I truly felt my thesis development to be valid and successful. Walking about campus I looked down and found a small chunk of a brick, not so uncommon on a Brutalist-style campus. But this brick, this little chunk of a brick, reminded me of all the physical and emotional qualities that I strove for in my sculptures - from specific textures to form and configuration.

I realized that all my study and staring, my continuous absorption in the images presented by the RIT campus, had truly become integrated into my sculptures. I felt as if another path in the cycle of my development had been completed; I was ready now to continue forward.

I have been honored in that one of the pieces from my thesis show, the sculpture represented in Photograph 14 in Appendix D, received the Wallace Library Memorial Purchase Prize Award and has been placed on exhibit on the first floor of Wallace Library. This prize is very special to me; I take great pride knowing that I have a piece in the permanent collection of Rochester Institute of Technology.

Appendix A Tables

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Table 1 Progression of Metaphor, Building Processes and Forms

Timeframe	Metaphor	Process	Form/ Description
Undergraduate	architectural materials and forms	wheel thrown sectionals	references to doric arq; 3' tall
First Year Graduate	enclosure/containment	thrown, carved	pottery forms: imagery of bricks/stones
	Spiritual Places	slab formed carved/ manipulated	boxes: mixture of geometric and organic under 12"
	introduction of Ascension	slab formed	sculptures: emphasis on stairs, carving approx 3'
	"Watching Places"	coil built	vessels: large; emphasis on volume square hole = entranceway/portal more graphic shapes; more distinct forms more geometrical than organic
Second Year Graduate	Ascension		sculptures:
Fall Quarter		slab formed	sectionals; thinner; more linear geometric; 10'
Winter Quarter		coiled/rolled slab over pole built in one piece then cut-up manipulated with paddles	mainly organic paddles: different widths 1/8" to 2" to 6"; different textures - found objects broken wood - grain -> sedimenting layers Wack! Wack! Wack! -> aggression - lift
		rolled slabs over pole sliced with wire cutters	even more narrow; more geometric emphasis on texture, spontaneity and fury
Spring Quarter		slab	"true" sectionals: modulars to be joined later
		carved with claw of hammer	gave a streaked, scratched at, climbed surface for modules

Table 2 Clay Body Formula

Redart	50 lb.	30 %
Foundry Hill Creme	50	30
Hawthorne	33	20
Grog, Medium	33	20
	-----	-----
	166 lb.	100 %
Barium Carbonate	3 lb.	2 %
	-----	-----
	169 lb.	102 %

Table 3 Firing Schedule

This is a sample of my firing schedule for the Alpine Gas Downdraft kiln.

Overnite pilots on overnite, door and spyholes closed, damper mostly closed

8:00 am open door, ajar about 6 to 12 inches
gas on, then back down (less than ½ #) for an hour.

9:00 close door
open damper to relieve if needed, for about three hours

Time	Gas	Blower	Damper	Temp Top/Bottom	Notes
12:15	0.5#	10	0.5"	/348	
12:45		50			
1:20	1.5			919/761	
1:45		70		1030/882	
2:00				1086/962	
2:15				1129/1016	
2:50	2	100		1200/1107	
3:15				1275/1189	
4:05	2.5			1380/1315	about 220°F/hr climb
4:45	3			1535/1461	
5:05				1596/1534	
5:45				1677/1629	
6:15				1733/1696	
7:00				1799/1775	
7:30	2.5			1842/1823	too much backpressure
8:15	3.5		1	1858/1840	
8:30			1.5	1890/1867	
9:00				1940/1917	
9:30				1965/1948	
10:20			in a little	2021/2004	
10:30		10-20			cones down- begin heavy reduction
10:45	0	0	closed		

Table 4 Index and Description of Photographs

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16	Modular Series, Sculpture #7; background: Organic Series, Sculpture #2 and Sculpture #3	47
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21	Organic Series, Sculpture #3, detail, base, ceramic, extreme closeup	52
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Appendix B Thesis Proposal

Thesis Proposal for the Masters of Fine Arts Degree

College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology

Title	Ascension
Submitted by	Clifford M. Commanday
	Date 9/13/94

Thesis Committee

Chief Adviser	Robert Schmitz
Associate Advisers	Richard Hirsch Bruce Ian Meader

Approval




Thesis Committee Approval

 9-21-94
(signature of Chief Adviser) Date

Department Chairperson

 9/21/94
(signature of Dept. Chairperson) Date

Committee Approval


Robert Schmitz

Richard Hirsch

Bruce Ian Meader

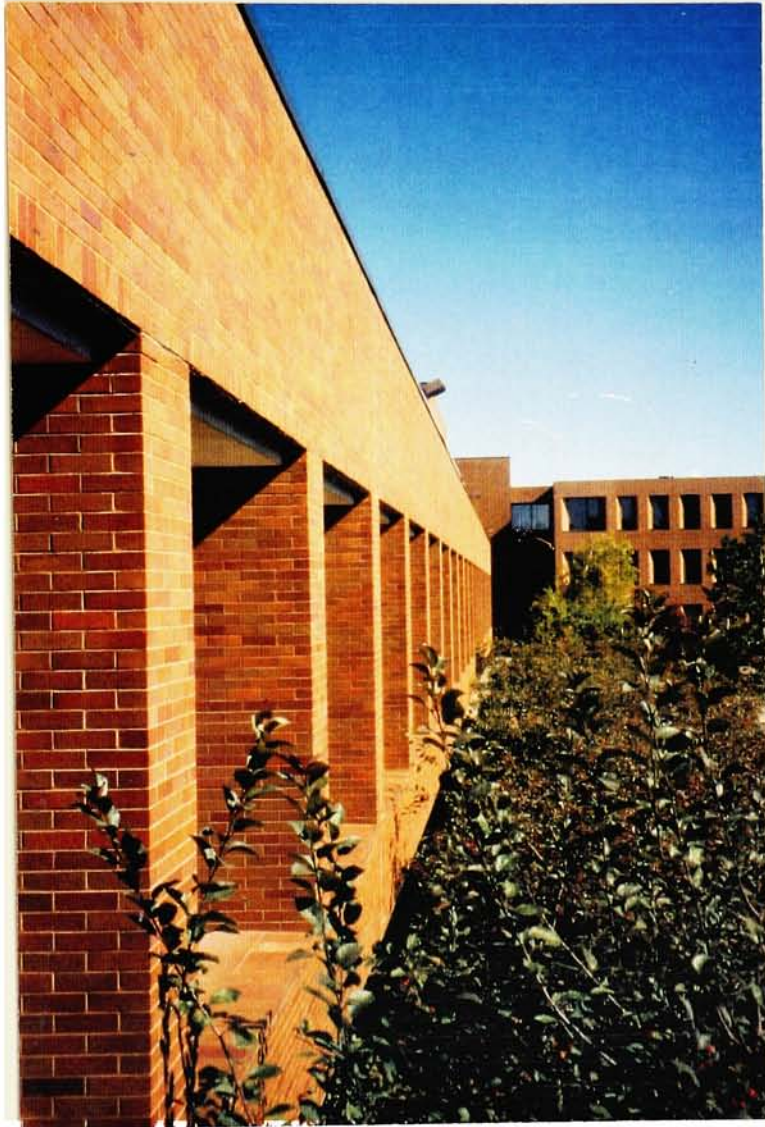
I intend to create a series of sculptures which communicate a sense of Ascension, a sense of moving upwards. This refers to ascension both physically and spiritually.

I leave open the possibilities of material, firing temperatures, and scale, as appropriate decisions shall be made as needed.

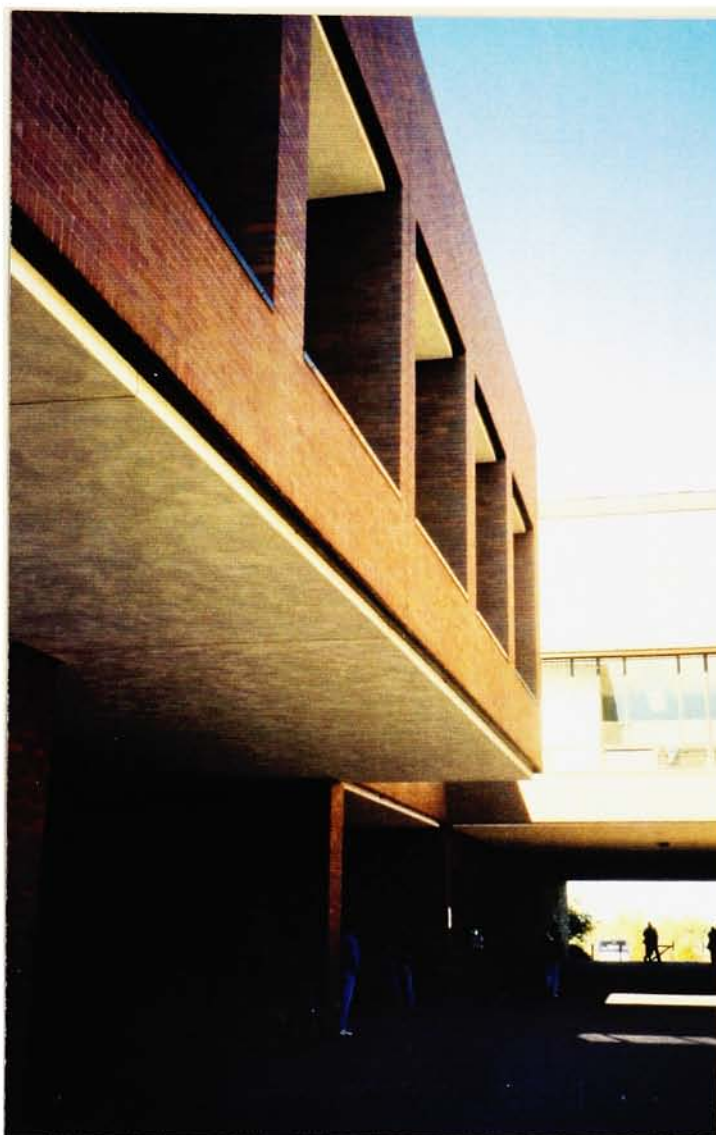
Spirituality and religion have always been important elements in my life. In retrospect, I have always looked at spirituality as a means towards personal growth and development. My interests in sculpture have proven to be a means of communicating these feelings.

Appendix C Photographic References

RIT, Brutalism	31
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Beverly Pepper	38



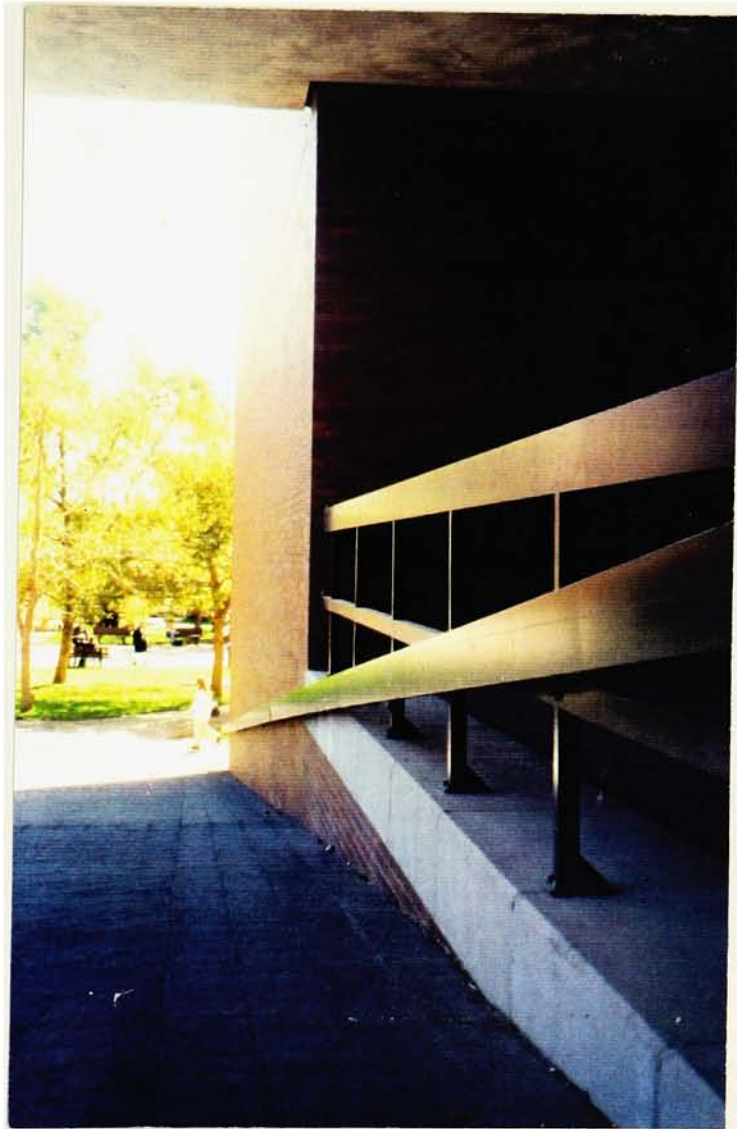
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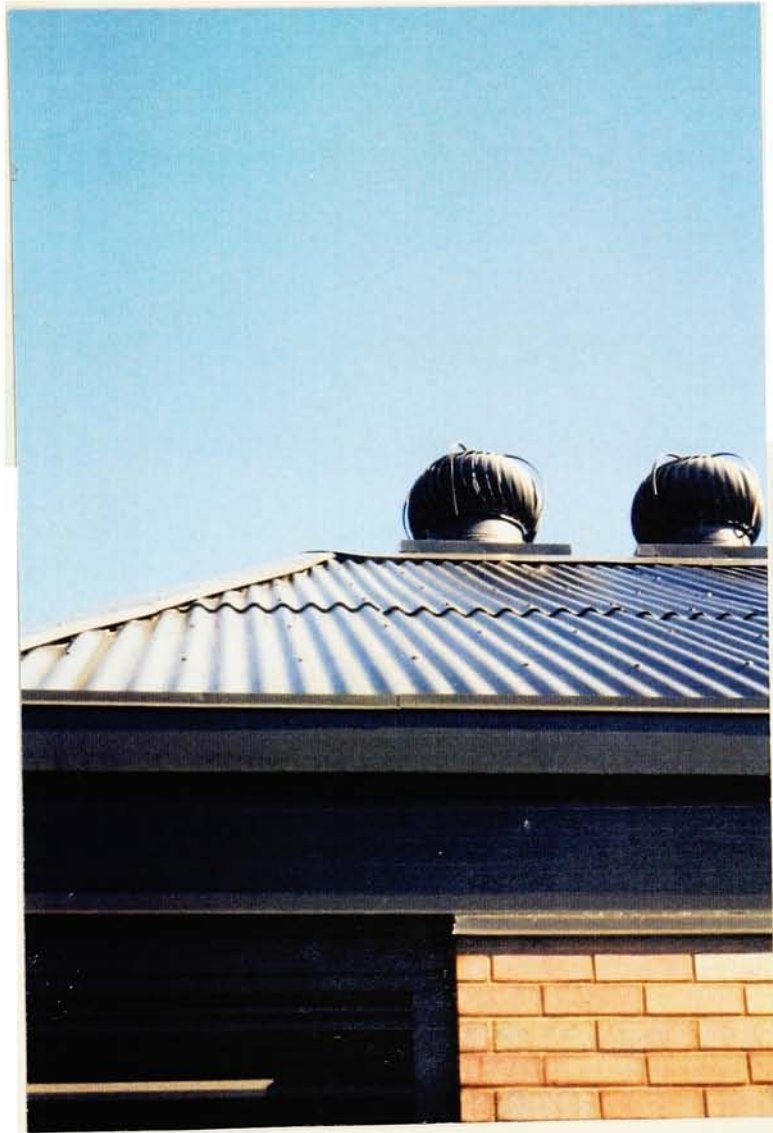
Photograph 2



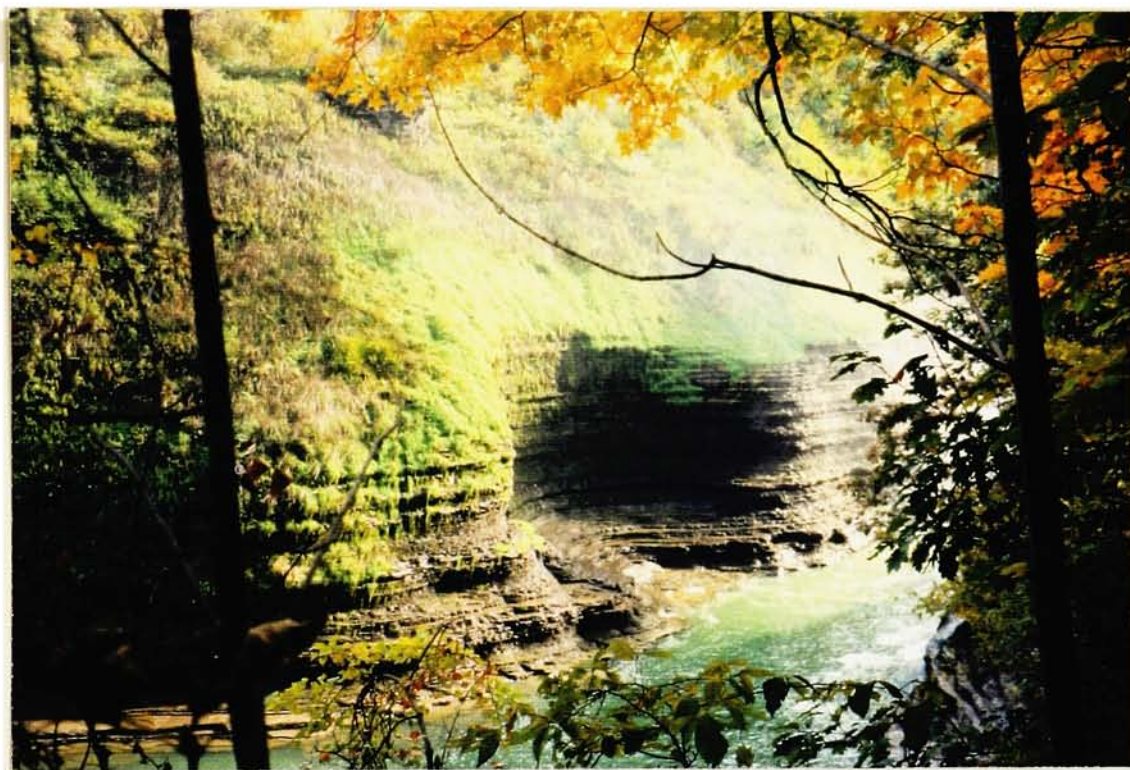
Photograph 3



Photograph 4



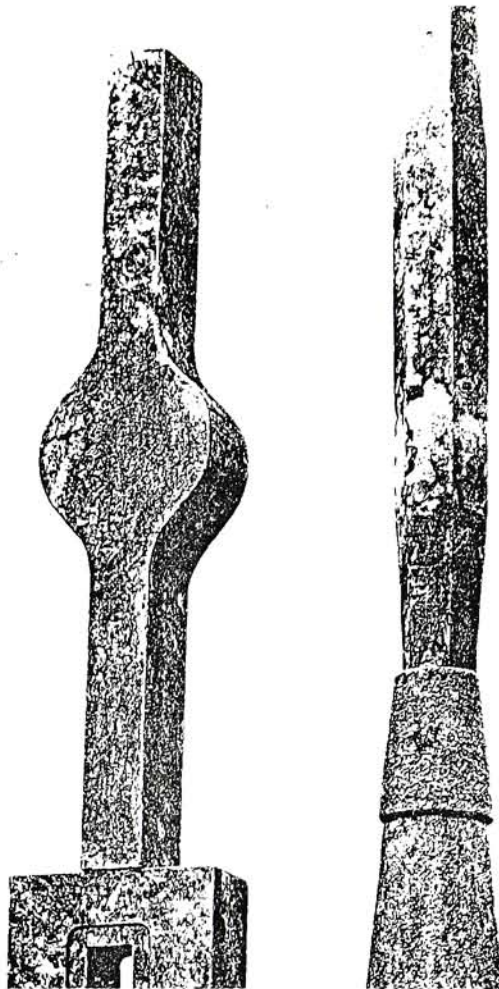
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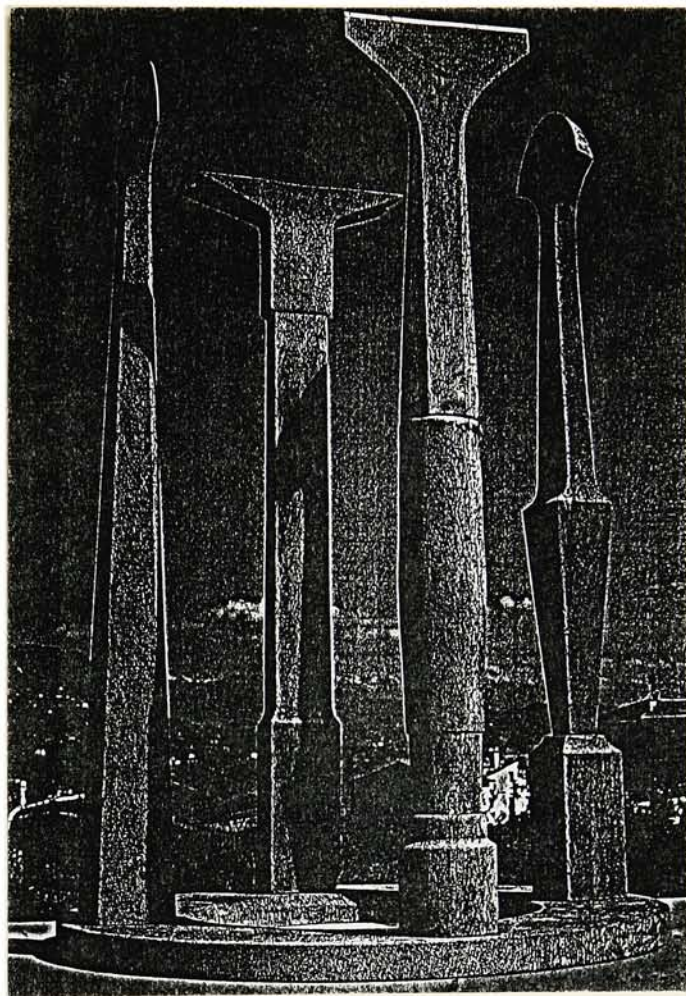
Photograph 6



Photograph 7



Photograph 8



Photograph 9

Appendix D Thesis Show Sculptures



Photograph 10



Photograph 11



Photograph 12



Photograph 13



Photograph 14



Photograph 15



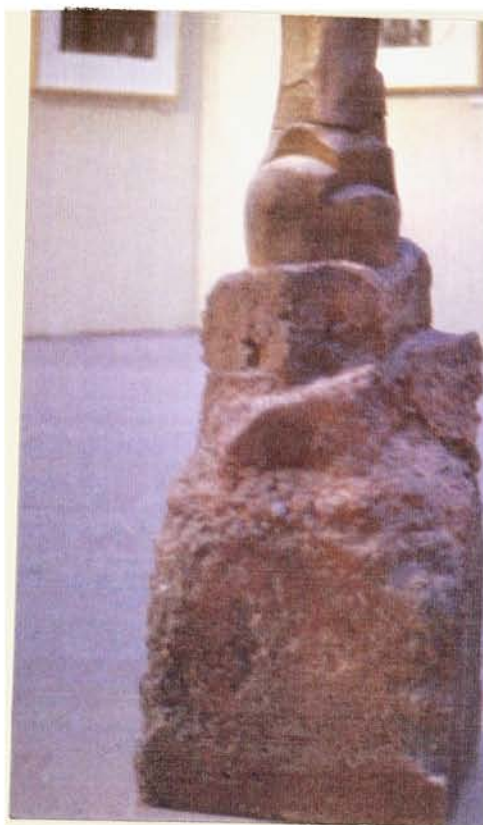
Photograph 16



Photograph 17



Photograph 18



Photograph 19



Photograph 20



Photograph 21



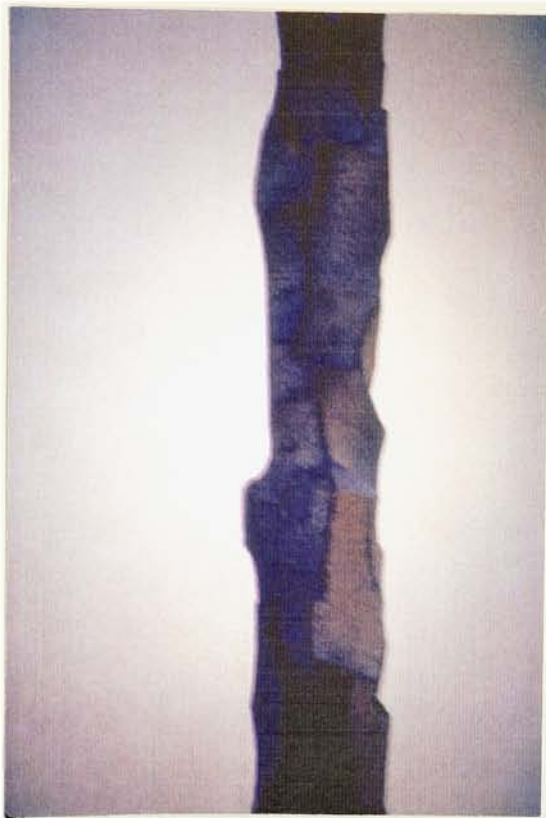
Photograph 22



Photograph 23



Photograph 24



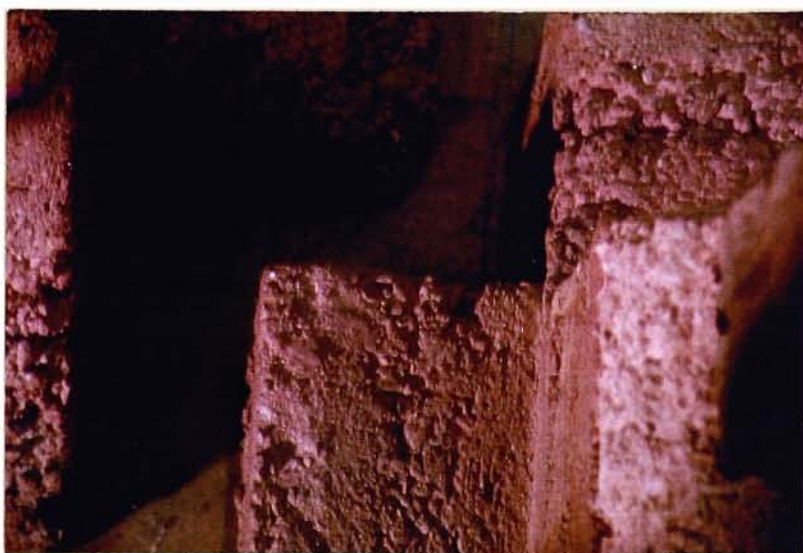
Photograph 25



Photograph 26



Photograph 27



Photograph 28



Photograph 29

Works Cited

Krauss, Rosalind E., Beverly Pepper: Sculpture in Place
(Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, NY, Abberville Press, 1986)

Photographic References

Photographs 8 and 9 from Beverly Pepper: Sculpture in Place;

all others by Clifford M Commanday.